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ABSTRACT

This booklet provides parents with information that will help them give their children a good start in developing social skills--skills which will continue to support them as they grow academically, physically, socially, and emotionally. The booklet includes a list of social skills, a four-step coaching procedure, and some examples of verbal interaction between parent and child. (RS)

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GROWING MORE SOCIAL, DAY BY DAY:

A PARENTS HANDBOOK

BY

MICHELE MORAN ZIDE
AND
BARBARA ENMAN SHAW

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TRINA ZIDE

Dedicated to our daughters, our wonderful, valued children who have taken the time to teach us.

Kellie, Elizabeth, and Whitney Shaw

Shanna, Marla, and Trina Zide

Dear Parents:

Many of us who are parents wonder what our young children will be like as they grow. What will they want to be? Will they succeed in school?

Research in the fields of child psychology and child development points out that pre-school children who demonstrate social skills are more successful in school and in their relationships with others than those who do not. This booklet is an attempt to provide parents with information that will help them give their children a good start in developing social skills. Skills which will continue to support them as they grow academically, physically, socially, and emotionally.

We share this information with you knowing that we, as parents, have a lot in common. We, as you, care for each of our children. We want to help our children become all that they can be. We accept the responsibility to teach our children the values, behaviors, the beliefs that will help them participate.

We hope that the information and ideas we share will be useful to you as you work to be the best parent that you can be.

Sincerely,

Barbara and Michele

Barbara and Michele

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WHAT ARE SOCIAL SKILLS

Social skills are those skills we use to get along with and fit in with family, friends, classmates, or with anyone with whom we come in contact. They address such abilities as communication, manners, expression of feelings and being responsible. These abilities related to knowing what we want, how to get it, and willingness to work toward selected goals are essential for success in life, regardless of our age.

WHY ARE SOCIAL SKILLS VALUABLE?

As parents, we want our children to acquire the skills that will enable them to be comfortable with themselves. We want them to be able to develop meaningful relationships with others. Most importantly, we want our children to be happy. Research has shown that children who have the necessary social skills to get along in society adjust more readily to the school environment, are more likely to complete high school, more successful in obtaining jobs, and more likely to develop meaningful, satisfying relationships.

HOW DO CHILDREN DEVELOP SOCIAL SKILLS

Social skills are most often acquired unconsciously. This occurs as the child observes and copies the behaviors ob adults and other children. It is important to note that the parents, teachers, relatives, and friends unknowingly teach activities. Social skills can also be learned by direct instruction or teaching.

Some parents feel that social skills will develop naturally as the child develops. This is true. Some skills will develop naturally. However those skills that do not develop naturally probably will not develop at all or will develop later after some embarrassment to the child. For this reason it is important for us as parents to keenly observe our child and when necessary, provide coaching or instruction. Support and reinforcement are imperative during each stage of our child's social skill development.

Some contemporary advisors encourage parents to be permissive and relaxed in rearing their children. However, studies have shown the result of inconsistent adult interaction to be the erratic development of social skills.

Several factors have had an impact on the amount and quality of time that parents and children spend together. Some of these factors include: the amount of television watched by children, the prevalence of single parent families, the necessity for two career marriages, and the absence of quality child care.

Regardless of the reasons, the effects of these factors are similar. Research has shown that children who do not interact with consistent role models appear less comfortable in controlled environments, less able to verbally express their communication, less other focused in decision making, and less with formal language skill development, relating to adults and authority figures, learning in school, and are more physical in their interactions with siblings and peers.

WHAT ARE SPECIFIC SOCIAL SKILLS?

The lists of behaviors that follow are those that you may expect your child to develop. As you observe your child and reflect on this social skills list, decide for yourself which of these skills you want your child to acquire. You can then coach your child to develop a specific skill with the result that this specific skill will become part of his/her personality.

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A SOCIAL SKILLS LIST
ONE AT A TIME

COMMUNITY BEHAVIORS

Movement in the community

- to accompany parent/other to the grocery store, bank, etc.
- to accompany parent/other to the library
- to play in the playground
- to ignore strangers
- to say "no" to adult community members when appropriate
- to wait in the doctor's office
- to attend religious service
- to attend school

Greeting others

- to make and maintain eye contact
- to respond appropriately to another's greeting
- to initiate interaction when appropriate

Participating in the community

- to follow directions of a leading adult
- to form and walk in a line
- to follow safety rules in crossing the street
- to walk on the correct side of the street
- to use sidewalks when appropriate
- to recognize community helpers (police, post, fire personnel, ect.)

BEHAVIOR WITHIN THE FAMILY UNIT

Being a family member

- to accept affection from other family members
- to demonstrate feelings through body language
- to express one's feelings
- to accept criticism
- to accept one's place in the family
- to verbally describe one's own feelings and moods to parents
- to verbally describe one's own feelings and moods to siblings
- to verbally express one's needs and wants
- to recognize and label moods of family members
- to say "no" to requests when appropriate
- to help with family projects
- to exhibit appropriate table manners
- to appreciate food and its purpose

SELF RELATED BEHAVIORS

Positive attitude toward self

- to say "thank you" when complimented or praised
- to make positive statements when asked about oneself
- to undertake a new task with a positive attitude
- to take risks knowingly and willingly

Taking care of self

- to brush teeth
- to wash oneself
- to use toilet facilities properly
- to prepare for a bath
- to choose one's clothing
- to put on clothing without assistance
- to wear outer clothing appropriate to the season
- to control one's wants by saying "no" to oneself when appropriate

Taking care of one's own space

- to identify one's own space
- to put away toys
- to make one's own bed
- to put things in the proper place in one's room
- to identify dangerous objects

SELF AND OTHER RELATED BEHAVIOR

Giving and receiving assistance

- to notice when someone needs help
- to offer to help others
- to ask for help when needed
- to thank others when help is provided
- to share one's toys or food with another when appropriate
- to ask another person to share with oneself

Accepting consequences

- to accept deserved consequences when breaking known rules
- to accept the responsibility for not meeting expectations
- to tell appropriate person if one has damaged property

Ethical behavior

- to distinguish between right and wrong
- to distinguish truth from untruth or fantasy in one's own statements
- to treat all people with dignity and respect
- to answer truthfully when asked about possible wrongdoing
- to avoid doing something wrong when encouraged by a peer

Making conversation

- to pay attention in a conversation to the person speaking
- to respond to another's question
- to respond to another's statement
- to ask a question of another
- to take turns talking
- to use the telephone appropriately
- to listen and talk using the telephone

Organized Play

- to follow rules when playing a game
- to take turns when playing a game
- to display effort in a competitive game
- to accept defeat and congratulate the winner in a competitive game.

Positive attitude toward others

- to compliment another person
- to appreciate the differences among people
- to make positive statements about the qualities and accomplishments of others

Property: Own and Others

- to care of one's own property
- to distinguish one's own property from the property of others
- to lend possessions to others when asked
- to ask permission to use another's property

You will know through observation whether or not your child exhibits some of these skills. If there are specific skills that you will like to help your child gain the following information may be helpful.

"Some skills adapted from: Stephens, T.M. (1982) Teaching Children Basic Skills: A Curriculum Handbook. Columbus, OH: Merrill.

BEING A COACH OF SOCIAL SKILLS

Social skills are specific behaviors that we can help our child to develop. Once a child acquires a social skill, it is never lost. It becomes a part of the child's abilities, a skill which the child can activate at will.

If a child admires, respects and values a person he/she is more likely to want to please that person and morel likely to imitate that person's behavior. A parent who is firm, direct, warm, and respectful of his/her child is the ideal teacher of social skills, the ideal coach.

COACHING FOR SOCIAL SKILLS

A proven, successful, four step coaching process for social skill development follows:

1. Identify the skill you want your child to develop.

2. Model the behavior.

3. Provide an opportunity for the child to demonstrate and practice the behavior.

4. Reinforce the behavior.

PRACTICING WITH THE FOUR STEP COACHING PROCESS

Below are a few specific examples that should help you work with your child on the skills which you can choose.

1. Identify the skill you want your child to develop.

(Skill: to exhibit an appropriate table manner, for example, to use one's napkin)

"John, I want you to take your napkin, open it, and place it on your lap. This is what is supposed to be done with your napkin. When you need to use it, it will be right there, waiting for you."

2. Model the behavior.

"Watch me." (Parent demonstrates the behavior.)

3. Provide an opportunity for the child to demonstrate and practice the behavior.

"John, now you try it."
John unfolds the napkin and places it on his lap.
"Like this, Dad?"

4. Reinforce the behavior.

"Good job placing the napkin on your lap, John. That is the right way to use your napkin. Good for you. I'm proud of you son."

Let's try another one.

1. Identify the skill you want your child to develop.

(Skill: to verbally describe one's own feelings and moods to parents.)

2. Model the behavior.

Situation: Mary stomps in from outside and she slams the door behind her. Mom says, "You seem upset, Mary. What's the problem?" Mary responds, "Never mind, leave me alone."

THE COACHABLE MOMENT!

The coachable moment! When an opportunity presents itself, don't let it pass. Mary has presented us with the perfect opportunity to teach her that expressing her feelings is an important part of solving a problem.

Try saying something like, "Mary, I get frustrated and confused when you act angry toward me. It is OK to be angry, but if there is a problem, I want to help you. People who love each other share their feelings. When we let each other know how we feel, then we can help each other."

3. Provide an opportunity for the child to demonstrate and practice the behavior.

Mary might say something like, "Mom I get mad at Bill when he always takes the swing with the rubber seat. It's my swing set. He runs faster and always gets it first."

4. Reinforce the behavior.

"Mary, now I know what the problem is and I understand why you are upset. Let's see if we can come up with some ways to solve the problem, but first, I want you to know that I am proud of you for telling me HOW you feel and WHY you feel that way. You said it well and it's very important for you to do that. You did a good job! Now, let's talk about how we can arrange for you to have the rubber seat the next time you and Bill play on the swing set." (All this ends with a big hug.)

THE HOW AND WHY OF FEELINGS

Two very important words in this scenario are HOW and WHY. Encouraging a child to describe HOW he/she feels in a given situation is the first step in understanding and communicating emotions. Encouraging the child to explain WHY he/she feels a certain way is the next step. It is important for the child to reflect on what happened to share and the events which occurred. This information can then lead to the development of a solution to a problem or to the honest expression of an important feeling.

The ability to express a specific feeling whether it is perceived to be positive or negative is an essential social skill. It is important that children learn to express their feelings in an honest, clear, unhurtful way to a non-judgmental adult.

SOME FINAL WORDS

In the busy cluttered lives experienced by many families today, it is important to be conscious of the vital role of social skills in a child's development. Parents are the primary coaches!

Being a parent is the most important job one can have. We hope that sharing this social skills list, the four step coaching process, and some examples of verbal interaction will be helpful as you prepare and renew yourself in your efforts to be the best parent you can possibly be.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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